

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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AMEMBASSY LAGOS IMMEDIATE
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AMEMBASSY OTTAWA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY OSLO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE
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S E C R E T BEIRUT 2803

EXDIS

DEPT PASS DIA AND OSD/ISA

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1 AND 2
TAGS: PORT, UNSC, XF, PBOR, LE, IS, SY, SA, KU
SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON: PROPOSED DEMARCHE TO SARKIS TO SEND
LEBANESE ARMY UNITS SOUTH

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REF: STATE 123904

1. QUESTION POSED PARA 2-B REFTTEL, SHOULD USG INSIST THAT
PRESIDENT SARKIS SEND A MINIMUM OF THREE COMPANIES OF THE
LAF INTO SOUTH LEBANON, RAISES SOME VERY BASIC ISSUES:

A. WOULD USG BE ABLE TO MAKE SARKIS TAKE THIS STEP AGAINST HIS
WILL? CHARGE AND OTHERS BELIEVE WE PROBABLY CAN, IF WE ARE PRE-
PARED ULTIMATELY TO WITHDRAW USG SUPPORT FOR SARKIS (STOPPING ALL
MILITARY AND ECONOMIC AID AND MAKING CLEAR TO LEBANESE AND OTHERS

THAT WE NO LONGER HAVE CONFIDENCE IN HIM) IF HE DOES NOT COMPLY. OTHERS IN THE COUNTRY TEAM BELIEVE THAT EVEN A THREAT OF TOTAL WITHDRAWAL OF USG SUPPORT MIGHT NOT WORK BECAUSE SARKIS' REFUSAL TO SEND LAF UNITS TO THE SOUTH IS BASED ON HIS CONVICTION THAT THIS WOULD LEAD TO MORTAL DANGER FOR LEBANESE STATE. SARKIS MIGHT VIEW WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. SUPPORT AS A LESS IMMEDIATE AND TOTAL DANGER. IF WE DO PRESSURE HIM AND HE REFUSES, LEBANON COULD FALL APART, A RESULT THAT IS NOT IN USG INTEREST.

B. SHOULD THE USG FORCE THIS ACTION ON SARKIS? CHARGE BELIEVES THAT IF WE ARE ABSOLUTELY CONVINCED THAT IT WILL WORK AND/OR THERE IS NO OTHER WAY TO PERSUADE THE ISRAELIS TO EVACUATE, TO SAVE UNIFIL FROM AN EMBARRASSING COLLAPSE THAT COULD HAVE AN EXTREMELY NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE FUTURE POTENTIAL OF THE UN, AND TO PREVENT THE COLLAPSE OF THE ME PEACE PROCESS, THEN WE ARE JUSTIFIED IN DOING SO. IF WE DO SO, HOWEVER, WE ASSUME A MORAL OBLIGATION TO GIVE SARKIS THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY SUPPORT HE NEEDS TO BE SUCCESSFUL. OTHER OFFICERS HERE DIFFER; IN THEIR VIEW THE SENDING OF THE ARMY SOUTH ENTAILS VERY SUBSTANTIAL RISKS, SINCE UNIFIL; AS PRESENTLY CONSTITUTED, AND IF SUPPORTED BY SOME LEBANESE ARMY UNITS, WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY FAIL IF IT ATTEMPTED TO CONTROL PALESTINIAN BEHAVIOR BY FORCE AND FATAH DECIDED TO RESIST. THESE OFFICERS BELIEVE THAT NEGOTIATIONS WITH FATAH, NOT FORCE, ARE
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THE ONLY REALISTIC MEANS OF CONTROLLING PALESTINIAN BEHAVIOR IN SOUTH LEBANON. THESE OFFICERS THEREFORE BELIEVE THAT WE SHOULD NOT URGE SARKIS TO SEND THE ARMY SOUTH. ACCORDING TO THIS VIEW, IF WE URGE SARKIS TO SEND THE ARMY SOUTH, AND IF THIS DEPLOYMENT RESULTS IN LOSS RATHER THAN GAIN TO U.S. INTERESTS (AND THESE OFFICERS BELIEVE LOSS IS LIKELY), THE RESPONSIBILITY WILL REST IN LARGE MEASURE ON THE UNITED STATES.

2. AS WE POINTED OUT IN BEIRUT 2759, SARKIS' UNWILLINGNESS TO SEND LAF UNITS SOUTH IS BASED ON SOME VERY REAL CONCERNS. IF WE ARE GOING TO PRESSURE SARKIS, AGAINST HIS JUDGMENT, TO TAKE THIS STEP, WE MUST BE PREPARED TO ANSWER HIS QUESTIONS AND MEET THESE CONCERNS. FOR EXAMPLE:

A. IF LAF UNITS (EVEN IF THEY ARE ONLY DOING LIAISON AND INTERPRETING WORK) ARE ATTACKED BY PALESTINIANS, WILL UNIFIL COME TO THEIR DEFENSE? WILL THE USG GUARANTEE THIS?

B. IF, AS A RESULT OF AN LAF-PALESTINIAN CLASH IN SOUTH LEBANON, FIGHTING BREAKS OUT IN BEIRUT AND THE SYRIANS ARE UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO RESTORE ORDER, WHAT WILL THE USG DO? (SARKIS AND KHOURY BELIEVE THAT LAF MUST DEMONSTRATE CAPABILITY TO HOLD TOGETHER IN BEIRUT AGAINST DISINTEGRATIVE FORCES BEFORE SENDING TROOPS TO THE SOUTH.)

C. IF THE LAF UNIT SENT TO THE SOUTH SPLITS APART, WITH SOME MEN JOINING HADDAD WHILE OTHERS JOIN THE PALESTINIANS AND THE LEBA-

NESE ARAB ARMY, WHAT WILL USG DO?

D. IF SARKIS SAYS HE CANNOT RISK SENDING ANY LAF UNITS SOUTH UNTIL ALL OTHER LAF UNITS ARE FULLY EQUIPPED, IS USG PREPARED TO SUPPLY THE NECESSARY MILITARY HARDWARE IMMEDIATELY?

3. OUR MAJORITY CONCLUSION IS THAT USG SHOULD NOT "INSIST" THAT SARKIS SEND LAF UNITS TO THE SOUTH NOW, BUT SHOULD CONTINUE TO TRY TO PERSUADE REPEAT PERSUADE SARKIS TO SEND A SYMBOLIC FORCE
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TO THE SOUTH. DATT BELIEVES THAT SARKIS COULD REASSEMBLE FAIRLY QUICKLY A CONFESSIONALLY-MIXED FORCE OF THREE COMPANIES (TOTAL STRENGTH ABOUT 300 MEN) WHO HAVE BEEN PREVIOUSLY SELECTED TO GO TO THE SOUTH. EVEN IF SARKIS CONTINUES TO DRAG HIS FEET ON SENDING LAF UNITS SOUTH NOW, HE MIGHT BE WILLING TO DO SO ONCE UNIFIL HAS REACHED FULL STRENGTH AND ITS SOP IS CLEAR. IT SEEMS TO US VERY REASONABLE FOR SARKIS TO WANT TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT UNIFIL'S MANDATE IS BEFORE HE COMMITS EVEN SYMBOLIC LAF UNITS TO THE SOUTH. THE LEBANESE STATE IN GENERAL AND THE LEBANESE ARMY IN PARTICULAR ARE VERY FRAGILE. IF EITHER IS SUBJECTED TO ANY PRESSURE, IT IS LIKELY TO SHATTER. POLOFF BELIEVES FURTHER EFFORTS TO "PERSUADE" SARKIS ARE DOOMED TO FAIL NOW AND IN THE FUTURE, AS THEY HAVE IN THE RECENT PAST, AND RECOMMENDS A HARD-LINE APPROACH INCLUDING THE THREAT TO CUT OFF MILITARY AND ECONOMIC AID (AND A WILLINGNESS TO COUNTENANCE THE COLLAPSE OF THE SARKIS REGIME IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS) COUPLED WITH POSITIVE INCENTIVES IN THE FORM OF INCREASED MILITARY AID.

4. IN OUR VIEW, THE NEXT STEP IN SOUTH LEBANON MUST BE TO PERSUADE THE ISRAELIS TO COMMIT THEMSELVES TO A SPECIFIC DATE FOR THEIR FINAL EVACUATION OF THIS AREA. ONLY THEN WILL IT BE POSSIBLE TO WORK OUT SOME ARRANGEMENT WITH AT LEAST THE MORE MODERATE PALESTINIANS TO PREVENT THEM FROM ATTACKING UNIFIL; ONLY THEN WILL IT BE POSSIBLE FOR UNIFIL TO DO ITS JOB WITHOUT RISKING UNACCEPTABLE LOSSES; ONLY THEN WILL IT BE POSSIBLE FOR OTHER ARAB STATES TO ASSIST LEBANON IN WORKING OUT A NEW STATUS FOR THE PALESTINIANS; ONLY THEN WILL IT BE POSSIBLE FOR THE GOL LEADERSHIP TO BRING HADDAD AND SHIDIAC UNDER CONTROL IN A WAY THAT IS ACCEPTABLE TO LEBANON'S POLITICALLY POWERFUL MARONITES; AND ONLY THEN CAN THE LEBANESE ARMY GO SOUTH WITH SOME CONFIDENCE THAT IT WILL BE ABLE TO PERFORM ITS TASK OF REASSERTING LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY IN THE AREA. WE REALIZE THAT THESE ARE NOT AIR-TIGHT ARRANGEMENTS, BUT SIMILAR MODALITIES HAVE WORKED IN PAST INTER-
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NATIONAL DEALINGS. THE IMPORTANT THING FOR THE PRESENT IS TO "ENCOURAGE" THE LEBANESE TO BE ANOTHER "CONTRIBUTOR" TO UNIFIL, AT LEAST SYMBOLICALLY, AND TO ACCEPT TO TAKE RISKS TOGETHER WITH UN FORCES.

5. POLOFF VIEW IS THAT THE PRECONDITIONS POSED IN THE PARAGRAPH ABOVE ARE IRRELEVANT TO THE QUESTION OF SENDING THREE SYMBOLIC LEBANESE ARMY COMPANIES TO THE SOUTH. THE ONLY RELEVANT QUESTION IS WHETHER OR NOT LEBANESE ARMY SYMBOLIC DEPLOYMENT IN THE SOUTH IS NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN THE SUPPORT OF UNIFIL CONTRIBUTING STATES. POLOFF BELIEVES IT IS, AND BELIEVES THIS IS WHY THE DEPARTMENT IS CONSIDERING REAL PRESSURE ON SARKIS. AT ISSUE IN HIS VIEW IS NOT COMPLETE LEBANESE ARMY CONTROL OF THE SOUTH, BUT RATHER A SYMBOLIC LEBANESE ASSOCIATION WITH UNIFIL.
LANE

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED DIA AND OSD/ISA.

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